

General care of vulval skin

Information for patients from Women's Health

Most women with a vulval disorder will benefit from the following advice on general care of vulval skin and avoiding potential irritants.

- Washing with water only causes dry skin and makes itching worse. Use a soap substitute (such as aqueous cream) to clean your vulval area. Use a small amount of the cream/ointment with water to wash your skin. This will stop your skin from getting dry and irritated, as it would if you use soap and water alone. The cream/ointment is safe to use frequently.
- Shower rather than bath, and clean your vulval area only once a day; over cleaning can aggravate vulval symptoms. If you have baths it is helpful to add a bath emollient (an emollient is a non-cosmetic moisturiser which comes in the form of creams, ointments, lotions, and gels).
- Avoid using sponges or flannels to wash your vulva, as these can irritate your skin. Instead, wash your vulva using aqueous cream or another soap substitute with just your hand. Gently dab your vulval area dry with a soft towel or use a hairdryer on a cool setting held away from your skin.
- Wear loose fitting silk or cotton underwear. Close fitting clothes such as tights, cycling shorts, leggings, or tight jeans should be avoided. Wear loose fitting trousers or skirts, and replace tights with stockings. At home you may find it more comfortable to wear long skirts without underwear.
- Sleep without underwear.
- Avoid fabric conditioners and biological washing powders. You may want to wash your underwear separately in a non-biological powder/gel.
- Avoid using soap, shower gel, body scrub, bubble bath, deoderant, baby wipes, and douches in your vulval area.
- Some over the counter creams including baby and nappy creams, herbal creams (such as tee tree oil and aloe vera), and 'thrush' treatments may include possible irritants.



- Avoid wearing panty liners or sanitary towels on a regular basis.
- Avoid antiseptic in your vulval area (as a cream or added to bath water).
- Wear white or light colours of underwear. Dark textile dyes (such as black or navy) may cause an allergy. If you wash new dark underwear a few times before wearing it, it will be less likely to cause a problem.
- Avoid coloured toilet paper.
- Avoid wearing nail varnish if you tend to scratch your skin.

Using emollients to protect your skin

- Emollients can be used as moisturisers throughout the day. These products can be bought in 500g tubs or 100g tubes over the counter or on prescription from your GP.
- Using one of these moisturisers every day can help relieve symptoms. Even when you do not have symptoms, using a moisturiser will protect your skin and can prevent flare ups. It is important to find the moisturiser that suits you best. If the first one you try does not work well it is well worth trying another.
- If your skin is irritated, aqueous cream can be kept in the fridge and dabbed on to cool and soothe your skin as often as you like.

This leaflet has been produced with and for patients

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